

Historical originis of the Ovaherero and Nama Genocide

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2019-11-11T14:00:55

One cannot discuss the issue of the Ovaherero and Nama genocide without referring to the causes that gave rise to it. Although Eurocentric historiographers have written most of the history of our genocide, which therefore includes undue biases, people who follow the dictates of their conscience have also written records that are more objective.

The first contact between Germans and the Ovaherero and Nama occurred through missionaries, followed by many other colonial agents. These various actors substantially damaged Ovaherero and Nama socio-economic life through fraudulent trading practices, trade agreements and land deals, even before official colonization. In 1884 and 1885, German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck convened the Berlin Conference. Its aim was to expropriate African countries and agree on terms to prevent competing European powers from warring during this “Scramble for Africa.” The conference, which excluded African representatives, was assembled to organize the commission of a crime against the peoples of Africa.

Decisions made at the Berlin Conference had dire consequences. During the final decades of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, as Africans in general and Namibians in particular, we lost everything that was ours. Solid, arbitrary boundaries were drawn up, which, in several instances, divided ethnic groups between countries. Africans lost their sovereignty, geopolitical territoriality and statehood. Europeans now controlled African men and women, giving them European names like Festus, Alfons, Barnabas, Reinhart, Erika, Esther, etc.

Article 6 of the [Berlin Conference Act of 26 February 1885](#) reads:

All the powers exercising sovereign rights or influence in the aforesaid territories bind themselves to watch over the preservation of the native tribes, and to care for the improvement of the conditions of their moral and material well-being [...] and to bring home to them the blessings of civilization.

If the “moral and material well-being” and “bringing home to them the blessings of civilization” were the real intent of the Berlin Conference and Germans in the new territory of what was then German South West Africa, then what Germany did was quite the opposite. They came here and committed an international crime against the Ovaherero and Nama peoples, for no other reason than because they refused to be colonized.

A few examples of the atrocities committed during German colonial rule in the areas known as Hereroland and Namaland that, in my opinion, constitute the crime of

genocide are: the brutal extermination, imprisonment in concentration camps and torture of our people, and their use as slave laborers by German farmers on their ill-gotten Ovaherero and Nama lands. German soldiers raped women and young girls and used them as sex slaves. Their offspring were left behind and cared for by destitute Ovaherero and Nama mothers. Ovaherero and Nama property, land, livestock and cultural items were looted and confiscated without any compensation and then sold to museums and medical institutions in Europe and the US. Our people were forced to flee to other countries like Botswana, South Africa, Angola, Cameroon and Togo, where the descendants of those who survived remain today.

Some lost their culture, which amounts to yet another, cultural, genocide. They were subjected to terrible hardships while fleeing, for example, across the Kalahari Desert, where many perished from hunger and thirst, as intended by General Lothar von Trotha. These actions contradicted all of the supposedly good words in Article 6 of the Berlin Conference Act. It is against this background that the Ovaherero and Nama say that the atrocities constitute(d) the crime of genocide, as defined in the [9 December 1948 UN Convention on Genocide](#).

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This text will also appear in: European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights (ECCHR), Colonial Repercussions: Namibia, 2019.

Cite as: Festus U. Muundjua, "Historical originis of the Ovaherero and Nama Genocide", *Völkerrechtsblog*, 11 November 2019.

